

THE CONSPICUOUS

AND

Endogenous Growth

—OF THE—

Christian Character.

—A SERMON BY—

M. N. M. BENNETT,

—A NATIVE OF—

Belize, British Honduras, Central America.

—PREACHED AT THE—

• FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH •

—[COLORED]—

SEPTEMBER 16th, 1894.



RICHMOND, VA.

VIRGINIA BAPTIST, Print, 309 & 311 N. 8th Street,
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"The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree." Ps. 92:12.

INTRODUCTION.

The pictorial description of the righteous is quite a vivid one. The psalmist could not have made a better analogy than taking the palm tree of his clime. As the writer of this article is more acquainted with the cocoanut palm and cabbage palm, I will keep two of the most graceful trees of the tropical clime as my picture that is, the cocoanut and cabbage palms. Since the different species of palm trees are alike in internal growth and development and nearly the same in external appearance, (with few exceptions) we grant that the psalmist is driving at the peculiar oneness of internal growth and the slight variation of external appearance.

No doubt, David was acquainted with the construction of the palm tree, for when he wants to describe strength, usefulness, protection, holiness, etc., he uses other figures, such as the cedar of Lebanon, etc. But noticing the context closely, the thought is a formation of a Christian character likened unto the inward and quiet growth of the palm tree, the slender queens of perpetual springtime, and the most graceful, majestic forms that mortal eyes can behold. As these attractive figures tower to the heavens in mid-air, exhibiting the skillful and artistic workmanship of their Creator, the spectator is moved to a sense of duty, action, unity, perfection, as he or she reads this passage.

The tree is conspicuous, because it is tall and graceful. Wherever it grows, its appearance is visible without much scrutiny. Concealment is not a part of itself, neither is haughtiness its glory; but true dignity, generosity, humility and liberality, each of these is portrayed separately, yet in harmony through its daily advancement. Hence, we the children of God that have been regenerated should possess these qualities, more so the leaders of the nation, people or tribe.

Pugnacity and despotism are not seen in its growth, so should the people of God be free from such abominable evils and malignities.

I. RUDIMENTS OF INTERNAL GROWTH.

In every sphere of life, we have principles whereby we are governed. And since that is true, we notice (1.) The susceptibility of impressions. The mind is capable of impressions, for it is like the stalk of corn, soft. The microbes of society are many. Deception has played an important part in the various circles of the world, so much so, that it has become honey on the tongue. Sad! yea, sadder to think that this ignominious act is found among the ambassadors of Christ.

The mind has a tendency to yield to and follow the wild fancies and vagaries of the world, consequently, we should go to the reservoir of the world, (the Bible,) which can supply every need of humanity with sufficient amount of water to wash and corrode away the evil impressions.

One writer speaks of the heart as being hard as a rock; but although hardened, God is able to change it into a heart of flesh. Paul says in Eph. 4:22-32, "That ye put off concerning the former conversation of the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lust."

"Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor." We can learn to envy, to tattle, to backbite, etc., by yielding to our lower nature. Awake! ye daughters of Zion; cry ye to the God of truth, justice, righteousness and peace and He will bestow the elements of virtue and purity on thee. 2. Pure thoughts are invigorating and strengthening to the human mind as the morning dew is refreshing to the grass of the

green carpeted field. Our minds should not be left vacant at any time of the illustrious men of patriarchal days, nor of the prophets, neither of the Prince of peace, in whom there was no guile, nor should we forget the great Designer, who formed everything so artistically, beautifully and magnificently. Pure thoughts will have as a natural result or consequence, pure motives, pure habits, spotless character and a holy destination.

Brilliancy of mind is not a necessary concomittant in the formation of a good, spotless character. Many men have shown resplendently in the philanthropic world; some have moved the world with the profundity of their philosophic minds; others by their skillful ingenuity and keen observation, have disclosed to the minds of nations, the hidden mysteries of nature. Yet endowed with all of these excellent qualities, without character, they are nothing. A clean heart and a right spirit, God will not despise. "A crushed and contrite heart he will receive." These conditions are necessary in building a noble character. Think right, act right and the result will be right; for character once lost, can't be regained. Then may we write in poetical language:

Character, the golden grain of life;
Bright in its color and precious in its worth,
So should every one crave its use,
Like the miser does the shining dust.

Pure and fresh as the evening dew,
Clear as crystal, yea, transparent clear,
Beaming forth in its royal state,
Tho' clothed in the garments of low rank.

Oh! character, hast thou fled to the mountain peak
Covered under the cramping snow?
Flee not! wander not! but stay thou firm,
For without thee, my life is naught.

The dazzling things of time may come,
The darts of Satan may be strong,
But with the word of truth I'll fight,
'Till death shall end this life.

3. Combination of energy. We should not sacrifice one principle for another. When a ship is making preparations for a voyage, the cargo, although various in its kind, the stevedore will never put all the iron on one side and a feather on the other, for it would not be in ballast trim and could not sail as fast as if it was otherwise loaded; and not only that, it could not stand the surges, or billows and winds of the ocean; but will capsize, and all the freight on board will be lost. So also it is true of the Christian voyage; our vessels should not be laden on one side with iron firmness, truth, benevolence and justice and on the other side, the feather of irreverent worship, hilarity of spirit, snickering in church, irregularity in church decorum and government; the result is, our Christian life will be a wreck and a stumbling block in the upbuilding of the Master's kingdom.

Let us unite the two great energies, love and truth, and all trifling demeanor in our Christian journey will be extirpated. Disparity of our actions is the discomfiture of many an unregenerated soul.

4. Self-control, the masterpiece of governmental architecture, stares us in the face every day as *we look* in the great structure of Christianity.

Man, the highest type of the animal kingdom endowed with *reason, feeling and will*, who can tell the cause and effect, who can tell the intensity of the effect, and is able to choose whether cause or antecedent is right or whether effect or consequence is wrong, ought not to allow self-esteem to cramp his other virtues. A man should possess a certain amount of self-esteem as would not permit him to encroach on his obligations to his fellow brother.

Mothers, fathers, guardians and all others, see that you keep your tongue in its proper place, (betwixt your teeth,) your hands on the right sort of tool, your feet in the road of duty and advancement, use your eyes in self-inspection, and home examination and tune your ears with hallowed strains and not allow the appetite and impulses of your being to be dominant, but fight manfully against all lustful feelings, taste, etc., with divine guidance, and you will be sure to lay these victims prostrate.

II. METHODS OF DEVELOPING PERFECT GROWTH.

Order is found in nature and the universe, hence we must notice the order and manner of growth. (1.) Moisture from the wells of salvation. Rain falls upon the earth for man and beast. "Plants live partly on gaseous and liquid food." Man also lives on material and spiritual food. In the same manner, the animal gets thirsty, so does the plant. The former takes it in the mouth, the latter absorbs it by its roots and dissolves it, and forms sap, which is conveyed to the branches of the tree as nourishment. The psalmist describes the Christian as likened to a tree planted by the river-side, fresh, green, vigorous and beautiful in the first Psalm.

The journey we have to run is not a smooth one. Wildernesses will confront us, rough paths to be smoothed, rugged steeps to climb, parched and sandy deserts to cross, and when our feet are burning from the scorching heat of sarcasm, and our tongues are parched with evil devices and our throats are scratching with thirst, go to the wells of salvation, drink the refreshing drink from which the goodly waters rise, from the following springs; courtesy, generosity, kindness, patience, humility and unselfishness.

These wells are united by the great cord of love with one common centre, Christ Jesus.

(2.) Heat of the Holy Ghost. Heat is one of the most cogent factors in developing growth. The growth of man in the various zones varies according to the temperature. It is also true in the Christian world. All of us are not alike in our Christian stature. but vary according to our knowledge or operation of the Holy Spirit.

"Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly dove,
With all thy quickening powers,
Kindle a flame of sacred love,
In these cold hearts of ours."

Notwithstanding that, we can't receive sufficient heat of ourselves to dispel the cramps of malice, the bonds of anger, the coldness of covetousness except the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, should come to our rescue and is received; then and only then we can have a quiet state of mind with God and man. It's the Holy Spirit's influence that will drive away all the dross of this world, blow around about us a holy and calm breeze, which brings us into sweet repose with God, our Father. Many times, the spirit of God is willing to abide with us, but from our nonsensical actions hinders the holy Messenger, which is the only comforter and friend we have, when cast

down, forsaken, and despised. Let whiskey, brandy, smoking, novel reading, be thrown aside when despondency seizes thee and commune with God, your maker, and the Holy Spirit with His warming love, like nature, will brighten thee up.

(3.) Light from the Eternal Son. Light, the great assimilating agent, has equipped itself excellently well from the time of creation up to the present, and shall until time and things are no more. If the light did not shine upon our trees, we would not have the beautiful color, green, on their foliage. Light is not only an assimilator, but also a guide and beacon.

Christ, the Eternal Light, assimilated himself into flesh, whereby we could comprehend the beautiful colors that were exhibited in His life. He is also a guide to humanity. The clouds of darkness over-shadow us and may be palpable obscure, yet he is able to direct our steps aright. Christ is the beacon and light-house of our voyage. He stands prominently towering the ethereal atmosphere above all other light-houses, spotless, blameless, undecayed, from *the wreck of time*. As the Great Beacon of our life, He is unsurpassed. If we steer wholly by Him, we are not going to miss the happy admittance into the peaceful harbor.

(4.) Watchfulness. One cannot be too observant in this world of trouble and trials. Our deeds and actions should be closely guarded, for we know not who is watching us, we do not know whether we are hindering the cause of Christ. But by close scrutiny, with the assistance of the Great I Am, we can always keep our lamps trimmed and bright.

(III.) THE EXTERNAL MAGNETISM.

The beautiful form of any thing will attract one with wonder and admiration. On the other hand, deformity will attract with disgust and sadness. True growth is the image of beauty and attractiveness. True beauty is the result of a perfect, quiet, mild and a happy system. Depression of mind will mar the most beautiful face, and an unhealthy system will result in, non attractiveness and sensitiveness.

1. Beauty of appearance. Beauty in itself is fascinating. Some think if life is extinct, the object under consideration is not attractive. Grant this to be true, we see on the other hand, true beauty in marble statues, for example, the figures of Venus and Apollo, not only in the marble but also on the canvas. The Madonna that has drawn the attention of nations to its artistic workmanship, portraying the highest pitch of man's aesthetic nature is without life. The question may arise, why does the lifeless rock or canvas draw one's mind out? I would say that the magnetism is the result of action chiseled or painted before an active mind. So also it is true of the Christian. His outward bearings are the result of an inward development.

Dignity becometh the man of God, gentility should touch humanity in every day contract, firmness should stand as the anchor of hope, a sweet smile should beam forth on every face, a kind look will many a time reclaim an erring brother. Since these actions will attract the attention of mankind, let us imbibe these principles, so that they may develop and may be seen in our every day life. We must guard against artificiality, which is so prevalent now a day. It will manifest its nakedness to the world if we try to have a pleasant smile, or a good word and is not meant, just like persons trying to make their hair straight out of stiff curly hair. Let every thing be natural. Artificiality is the grave-yard of many a young blossom. This is true in every sphere of life.

2. Symmetrical in formation. The palm tree is one of the most beauti-

fully formed trees in the world. Looking at the formation of its leaves and its general adornment, our eyes are drawn to the beauty spots and we can not help but admire the stately queen of the tropical forest. If man in general would have all his thoughts well balanced and his habits well dressed and his character symmetrically formed, he can at one moment attract the attention of his fellow creature to a natural development of manhood, suspicion and criticisms will not be hurled at us if those qualities are equally balanced.

Not only is it symmetrical in formation, but it is musical also in its adornment. When the rustling wind passes through the leaves, the dominant chord of nature takes up its charming song, and so the traveler steps along amid the shrubs, hark! there is a sweet sound; what can that be? Looking up in mid air sees the graceful image nodding its head to and fro praising its Creator, strikes him and he cries out and exclaims, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful! Music is one of the external attractions in christianity. How can we make it more attractive? Every member of any congregation should have a book and when the hymn is being read, every one should follow each word, so that he might catch the spirit of the writer, when the tune is played over, listen carefully and join in on the first note, then and only then, can the praise of God be well rendered. Irregularity of sounds is noise, but regularity in motion is music.

Hence the irregularity that is often seen in our churches should be discarded. Some people think the church should buy hymn books for them. That is a mistake. It shows that God is not properly recognized in their homes, for we ought to familiarize ourselves with the hymns so that we may be able to sing with the understanding and spirit and not feel it a burden. One writer says "music is the breadth of Christianity, whether its notes be voiced by nature, instrument or human lips." David says "Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord." Music has been the cause of many a sin-sick soul coming to the great Physician of souls to be healed, therefore it is our duty to have the best music, and praise God with our whole heart, soul and spirit.

(3.) Another attraction is the abundant fruitage. How many of us who profess to be christians and our life is far different. "By their fruits, ye shall know them," saith the word of God. The palm trees are always filled with beautiful fruits. The fruits generally in one way or another, prove a blessing to mankind. So should we live, and act that our fruits may be seen and tasted of men. The fruit of the christian is "love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance." Our lives are either giving a bad or good influence. Let our lives or fruits be like the palm tree, a blessing to humanity. Read the epistle to the Ephesians through, and you will find the daily chart of life mapped out for every one of us in beautiful colors.

IV. THE PURPOSE OF THE GROWTH.

1. To purify the atmosphere of sin. In like manner as the trees are made to assist purifying the air, which is filled with obnoxious odors more or less, so also are Christians placed here to bring about a cleansing process in the atmosphere of sin.

(2.) For the protection of humanity from the scorching heat of immorality. The trees when blooming in their fulness, stretching out their branches here and there, covered with beautiful, green leaves in summer time, protect both man and beast from the intense heat that we are accustomed to. Christians are placed here for this purpose. He is not to stand aloof in his

home, allowing immorality of any kind to be around him, or to be partial with some in reproving, but should try and help all, as the trees do; protect all that come under their boughs, yet, like the trees, we should be always spreading out, so we may be able to assist, reach, or protect sufferers. We are not to live for ourselves only, but for others also. Personal responsibility is a potent factor in protecting the kingdom of God from the heat of immorality.

(3.) Prevention of immediate evaporation of the bountiful showers of blessings upon mankind. On account of the pious and righteous man, many a time when disaster and destruction would come upon man, it is withheld. Notice the case of Lot: God did not destroy the city until he came out. "The effectual, fervent of prayer of the righteous man availeth much." Prayer should be the bread, meat and drink of the righteous, for if we don't do that, the blessings that are bestowed upon us will evaporate.

(4.) Provisions for daily necessities. The fruits and blossoms of the various trees provide for man's daily wants either as food, clothes, or medicine. "Pure religion and undefiled" before God and the Father is this,— "To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Charity is the capstone of christianity. Let us all possess this virtue which will leave us to do what God has made us for—to feed the poor, to visit the sick.—Matt. 25:34-46.

(5.) For the adoration and glory of its Maker. God made all beings for his glory and honor. Hence let us honor and magnify his name, giving him thanks for what he has done for us, "For of him and through him, and to him, are all things to whom be glory forever."—Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:16; Isa. 48:11; 2 Thess. 1:10-12.

In conclusion, let the rudiments of the growth be fastened upon our minds, the methods of developing perfect growth be indelibly stamped on our daily walks, the external attractions be carefully watched and the purpose of the growth be the gem of admiration. External attractions wont amount to much if there is no internal foundation, for if the outward are not in accordance with the inward, failure will set in. Let artificiality go into oblivion. Take care of things as God would have you do and not change his work. A leper cannot change his spots, nor can the son of Ethiopia change his skin. Keep near to God in prayer. Go to the Comforter of life for assistance and comfort. Be guarded by the Light of the world, cultivate pure thoughts, be regular in your church duties, and exalt the Maker of Heaven and earth, and by following these few feeble suggestions, the inward growth will not be dwarfed, but will spread its influence so that all coming will be attracted and be benefited. Perfection should be the precious gem sought by the man of God. Holiness becometh the people of God, therefore let us act on this principle, until the great judge of all things summons us to appear before him to give an account of our stewardship. Amen.



